

PREVALENCE OF HEPATITIS B AND C, HIV, AND SYPHILIS AMONG PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS IN GERMANY – RESULTS OF A PILOT STUDY FOR A PERIODICAL NATIONAL MONITORING SYSTEM

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Background

Germany has dedicated itself to implement the WHO „Global Health Sector Strategies on, respectively, HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections for the period 2022-2030 (GHSS)” by publishing the “Integrated Strategy for HIV, Hepatitis B and C and Other Sexually Transmitted Infections”

To support and monitor the viral hepatitis/HIV/STI elimination process in Germany, up-to-date prevalence and behavioural data in key populations are needed on a regular basis. We piloted a future monitoring system among people who inject drugs (PWID) with the DRUCK 2.0 study in two federal states in Germany.

Methods

- **WHAT:** Multicentre cross-sectional study
- **WHEN:** 3-6 months data collection per federal state in 2021/2022
- **WHO:** ~ 700 PWID aged 16+ years who injected drugs within the last 12 months
- **WHERE:** Recruitment via low threshold harm reduction facilities and opioid substitution treatment (OST) services during routine services in two federal states (Berlin and Bavaria)
- **WHAT:**
 - Testing for hepatitis B and C (HBV, HCV), HIV and syphilis from capillary dried blood spots
 - Questionnaire regarding sociodemographics, behaviour and access to testing/treatment

Results

Recruitment & Sociodemographics

- Recruitment in seven cities of two federal states (Berlin & Bavaria)
- 20 low threshold harm reduction facilities and three OST services
- 87% (521/596) of participants were recruited in low threshold harm reduction facilities

Study participants	N=596
Age (median)	39 [17-66] years (n=596)
Sex	68% male (404/595)
Country of birth	22% born outside Germany (131/596) → 42% Eastern Europe (53/125)
Education	53% completed 9 th grade (308/582)
Homelessness	75% ever (434/577) 34% currently (142/416)
Detention experience	77% (451/585)

Drug use

- Age at first drug use (median): 20 [9-55] Jahre (n=578)
- Most commonly used drugs: Heroin, Cocaine, Crystal Meth
- Injecting drug use during the last 30 days: 84% (494/589)
- Currently under OST: 61% (357/582)

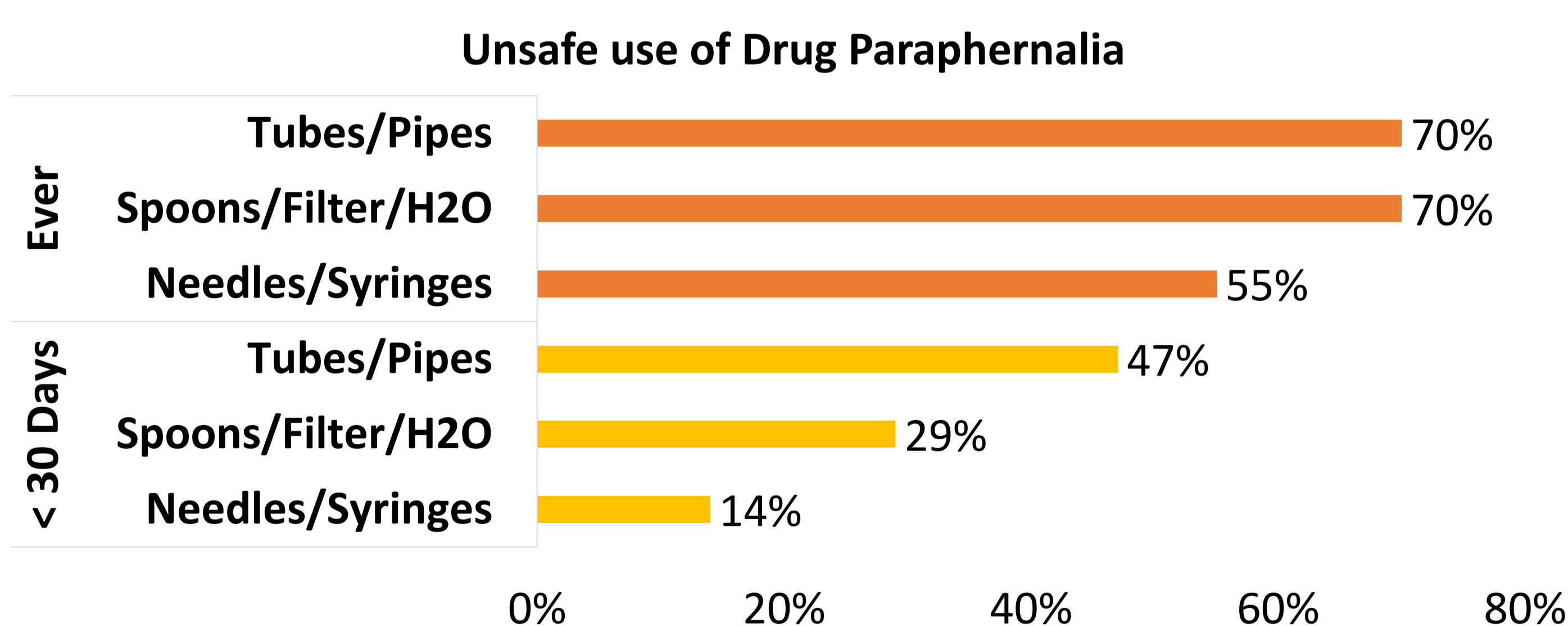


Figure 1: Proportion of participants indicating unsafe use by time and drug paraphernalia.

Prevalence

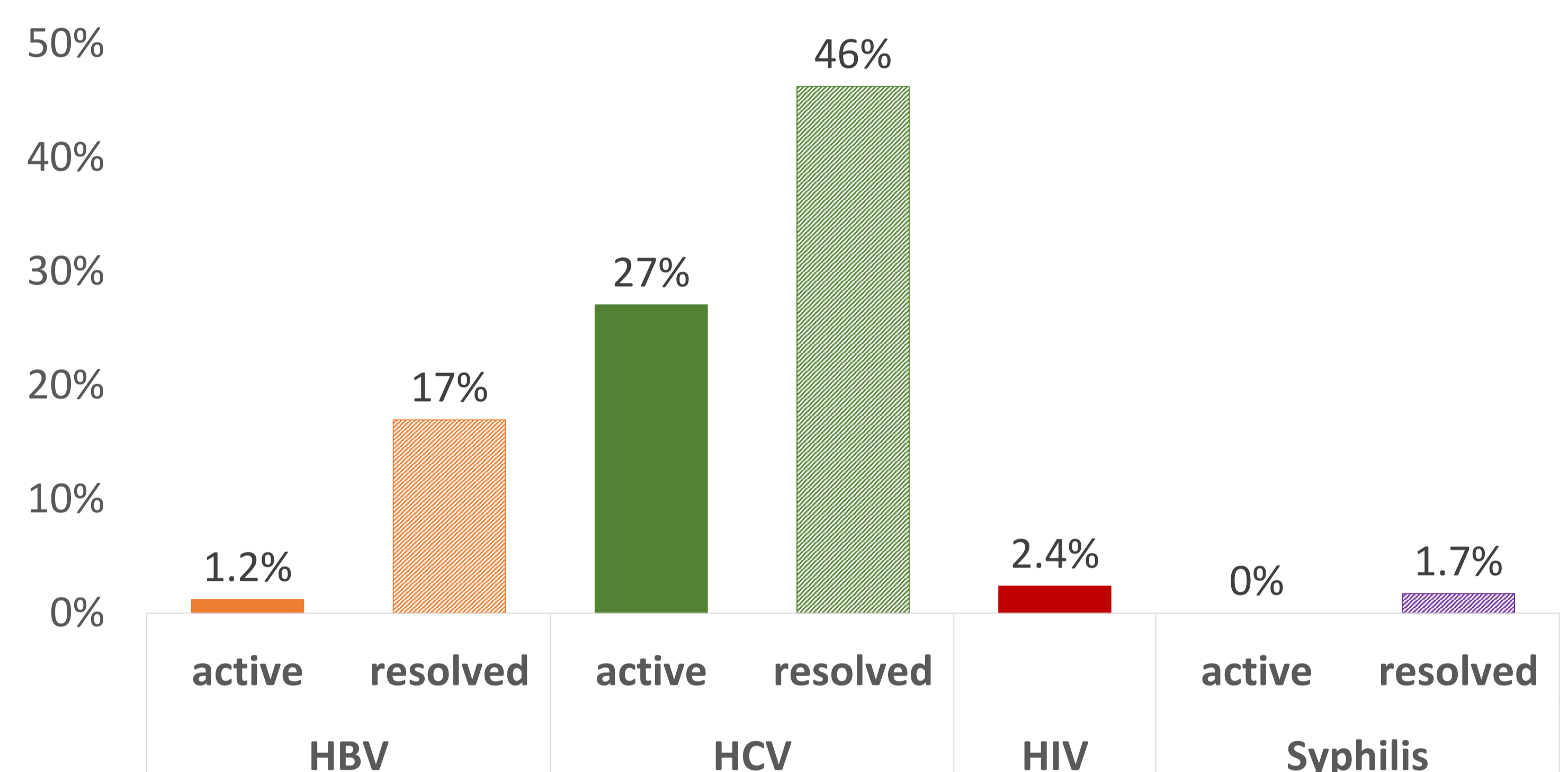


Figure 2: Infection prevalence for HBV, HCV, HIV and syphilis based on laboratory testing.

- 25% (142/576) had Anti-HBs antibodies indicating HBV vaccination*

HCV Treatment cascade

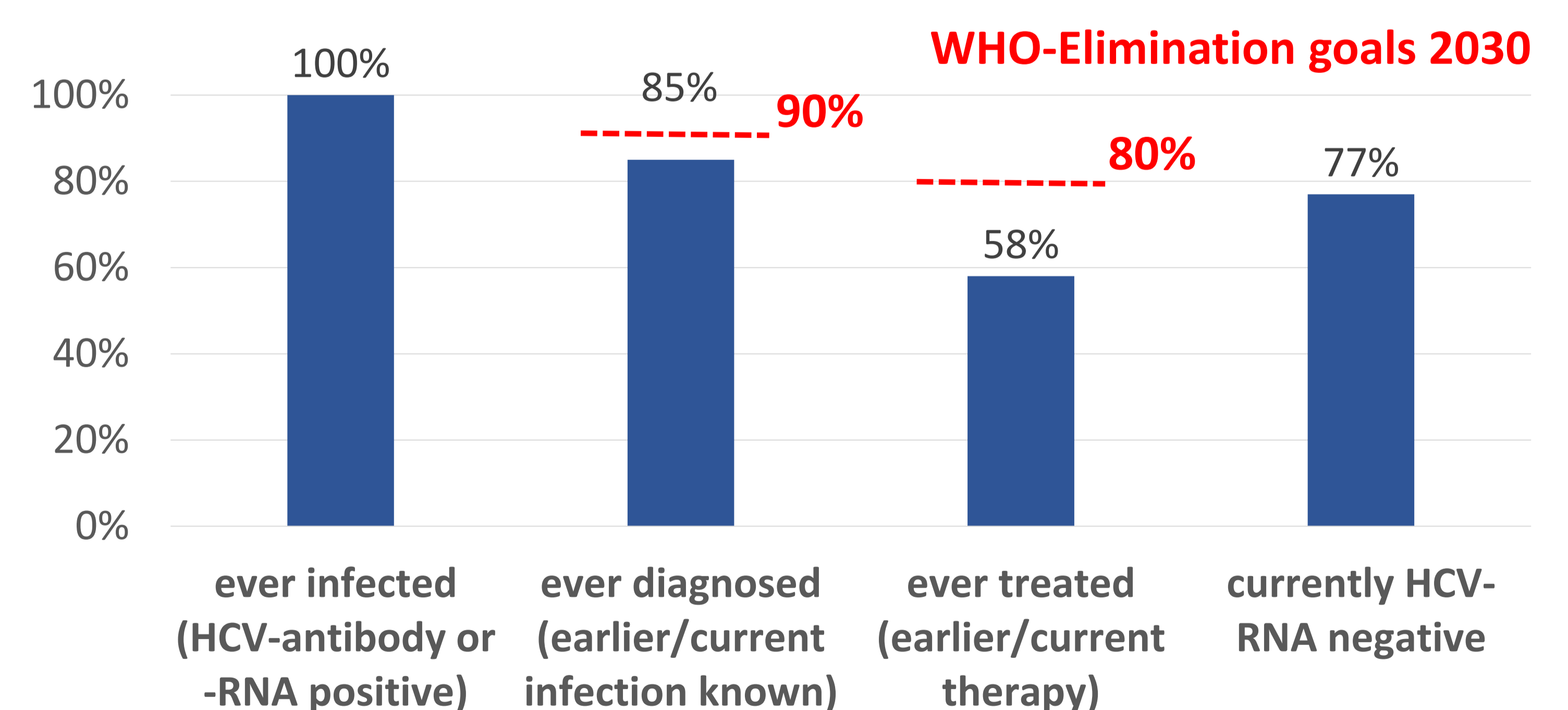


Figure 3: HCV Treatment Cascade among Anti-HCV positive participants (n=435).

Conclusion

The results of this study show a high proportion of current homelessness as well as unsafe use among participants. The high prevalence of resolved HCV infections indicates high proportion of treated infections, however active HCV prevalence is still high and the HCV treatment cascade shows a gap towards reaching the elimination goals. Proportion of serological HBV vaccination detection suspects insufficient coverage.

To decrease the heavy burden of infection among PWID, barriers to HCV treatment, HBV vaccination, and harm reduction need to be resolved. Future national monitoring is needed to continuously guide the elimination progress among PWID in Germany.